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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE~~

March 16, 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR DISCUSSION, TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 1:00 PM

Policy in Vietnam

a. Military actions

1. ROLLING THUNDER. DOD will present a proposed four-week program designed to increase the effectiveness and visibility of air strikes. Essential changes in this program are its increased flexibility to avoid weather delays and its delegation of operational control on a week-by-week basis to the field (CINCPAC and MACV).

2. BARREL ROLL. State and DOD are coordinating closely on a program which again is intended to be more effective and more visible (at least to Hanoi). This program will imply daily route reconnaissance and 3 or 4 operations for attacking or reseeding choke points each week.

3. 21-step Johnson program is being reviewed and general approval is expected.

4. [Major ground force deployment.] Defense and State are both reviewing this question and recommendation should be available for discussion next week. Preliminary analysis suggests that [such deployment may soon be necessary for both military and political reasons.] ✓

b. Political and civil action in South Vietnam

At the President's direction, State, AID, and USIA, with the White House Staff, are framing a program designed to match and even outmatch the military efforts outlined above. This program will be designed to present additional actions in such categories as the following (the list is illustrative and not exhaustive): close control of the population; new programs to encourage Viet Cong defection; land reform operations; new information and propaganda programs; new incentives to university students; new programs of guerrilla action in Viet Cong-controlled areas; intensified housing and agricultural programs; progressive U. S. political announcements; increased contact at all levels with political and religious groups; greatly increased decentralization of all U. S. efforts in the light of weakness and instability of central government.

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By 110 NARS, Date 1-25-80

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c. U. S. leadership in Saigon. General Taylor's return at the end of the month has been announced, and the question of the timing of his replacement and the name of that replacement is increasingly urgent. There should be preliminary discussion today, and a full slate of candidates should be available for discussion next week.

d. The political and diplomatic position. [We have largely accomplished the immediate purpose of getting our new level of military action into operation without yielding to clamor for "negotiations." We now need to examine both our public and our private view of the conditions for a settlement.]

1. Public position. There is a strong argument for a more detailed exposition of our conditions for peace, and our view of the future in Southeast Asia. It may be wise to have a draft prepared for consideration over the weekend and review on Tuesday, with no commitment as to the level at which such a statement might be put out.

2. Our private assessment of the bargaining problem. The existing situation in South Vietnam is bad, and the basic condition of any political negotiation is that it should allow us to continue to take actions which will in fact improve the anti-Communist position in South Vietnam. This means that this can only be done by successful pacification, and therefore our object must be to trade off our own trumps in return for enemy actions which will give us advantage in the South. This will not be easy.

[In essence, there appear to be three things that Hanoi can do: it can stop its infiltration; it can withdraw forces and supplies under its control from the South; it can order its people not to use force against the government in the South. None of these is likely at present, and it is questionable whether any of them will be ordered under the pressure of our air operations alone.]

Nevertheless, we can and should consider at what point we would reduce our air operations against the North in return for actions of this sort by Hanoi.

Preliminary analysis suggests that we might well wish to indicate privately that the weight and locus of air attacks will be raised and lowered in direct relation to the amount of Viet Cong force and/or infiltration we observe.

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Of course it is not essential from our standpoint that we stop hitting the North before serious bargaining begins. But it may be necessary that we have a public price for doing so, if only to make it clear that our position remains careful, reasonable, and measured.

e. The shape of an eventual settlement. Only the broadest outline of this question can be stated now, but there appear to be three general possibilities.

The first would be effective pacification of a wholly non-Communist South Vietnam. This is desirable but hardly possible today. If this is our real target, it is doubtful that we want an early settlement.

The second is a somewhat Laotian solution, in which a government of national unity would have some members from the liberation front and in which de facto VC control in large parts of the countryside would be accepted. This is what the French and the Lippmanns have in mind, and our current estimate is that this solution would be acceptable only if some significant U. S. presence remained, to sustain de facto non-Communist control in substantial areas of the country, including especially Saigon and its surroundings.

The third is an explicit partition of SVN, leaving the clearly non-Communist government in control of as large a territory as possible. This solution might permit a reasonably quick reduction of U. S. forces if real pacification were achieved in the non-Communist territories and if the ground given to the VC were sufficiently limited. But it is also probable that continuing VC ambition would quickly lead to a situation in which we would have to return.

It does not appear necessary today to decide among these three alternatives. What does appear quite likely is that our eventual bargaining position with respect to all three possibilities will be improved and not weakened if the United States presence on the ground increases in coming weeks. This U. S. ground presence is likely to reinforce both pacification efforts and Southern morale, while discouraging the VC from their current expectation of early victory.

McG. B.